

- As we begin, I want you to recall who you were, when you were 20 years of age. What Callings may there have been then of what you love doing today?
- Think back 10 years ago, January 2014, what was your previous church, or this church, like then?
- Think back 5 years ago, January 14, 2019, Before COVID, what was life like, what was church like? Neither Wes, Jamie, Jan, or I were here yet. Who would have imagined the World shut down, the Stark Market, all air transportation stopped.
- 2018 There had been a Television Show titled CODE BLACK imagining Hospitals exceeded capacity, then Hospitals around the world DID exceed capacity and the television drama was taken off.
- A little less than 4 years ago, I had been here about 4 ½ months, We suddenly were prohibited from Passing the Peace of Christ or celebrating the Sacrament of Communion, when we could not hug grandchildren!
- For decades, experts said “People over 65 and Churches will never use Computers, Zoom, Live Streaming, purchasing items on their telephones!” And within a week, we were on-line!

Now, what might GOD do in our midst, in the next 5 or 10 years?

We have come to understand that NET GROWTH of GREEN VALLEY IS STATIC; However, 10% of the population turns over every year! In the last 12 months our church had 41 resurrections; 30-40 new members, with 15 or more additional meeting with me today! What will Green Valley be, what will our lives be, what will our Church be: 3 or 5 years from now with 30-50% New Members?

- Imagination grants us space to be Creative, Optimistic!
- A year from now is Planning. 20 years is guessing. 3-5-10 years given the pace of today, is possible!
- In Futures-thinking, there is what is called DATOR’s LAW: “Ideas about our future should appear RIDICULOUS!” Remember the 1920’s & 1930’s Dick Tracy, Buck Rogers, Recall the JETSONS in the 1960s! How many of us check our pulse & answer the phone on our Wristwatches? How many no longer carry CASH? When we tripped on Telephone cords? The one caveat to DATOR’S LAW, is NOT ALL RIDICULOUS IDEAS ARE USEFUL! Some ideas, are Ridiculous!
- Look for Clues from the world around us. Have you heard about “PIZZLY BEARS?” As the polar Ice caps are melting, Polar Bears are migrating to warmer climates. Instinctively, they have discovered that Grizzly Bears are better at scavenging and gathering food than Polar Bears, so the FEMALE POLAR BEARS are mating with MALE GRIZZLIES to create Pizzly Bears!

Rivers and Coastlands are FLOODING, as well as expansion of DESERTS, in the next 10 years, projections are that over 1 Billion People will be Migrating. We worry about 1,000 people crossing the Border. What if 1 Billion people out of the World’s 8 Billion were to Migrate at a time?

- 2014, five years before COVID affected us, a Researcher gathered 1000 people and hypothetically asked, HOW WOULD WE RESPOND TODAY IF A BLACK PLAGUE OR SPANISH FLU HAPPENED? Their answers had no bearing on Government Policies, but when she gathered the same people recently, they described imagining possibilities ahead of time, they had ideas of what to do.\*
- Maybe the World will turn to the Church for LEADERSHIP, rather than for WORSHIP or SPIRITUALITY? I was listening to the Radio while driving, as the show discussed the Surgeon General has made his Top Priority ISOLATION & LONELINESS as Medical Crises! In response, the broadcast described our need for Neighbors and Community, and they turned to the WISDOM of MISTER ROGERS! After which they began a broadcast about this being MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. weekend. Yet, only in passing, did either broadcast even mention that BOTH were Pastors of CHURCHES, and never mentioned: CHURCH as being about CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER as a ready-made COMMUNITY to overcome Isolation and Loneliness.

Rarely do pastors preach from the Book of Judges, stories of Gideon, Jephthah and Samson slaughtering Canaanites, does not offer a lot to sermons. After Slavery to Pharaoh, the people endured 40 years searching for the Promised Land, Moses died, then begin the period of JUDGES. Powerful in the Book of Judges, is the oft repeated phrase, "Each person did what seemed right in their own mind," which regularly gets them into trouble. The situation progresses into the book of Samuel, when the phrase arises "**In those days the WORD of God was rare, there were not many visions.**"

There was a Hebrew Man who had two wives, one whom he dearly loved who could not have children, the other who was very fertile, had many children, and teased her rival. Does this story sound familiar? Except here it is not about JACOB with RACHEL & LEAH, the man's name was ELKANAH, his wives were HANNAH and PENINNAH. Being Unable, became a burden to HANNAH. She longed to have Swollen Ankles, Morning Sickness, Sleeplessness and Stretch Marks! probably more likely, to feel the movement of life within her, to experience birth and suckling. HANNAH prayed, that if given the experience, she would then gift the child to GOD rather than keeping the child herself.

While we rarely express this action so directly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic CONFESSION names Infant baptism as the Parents who have been given the gift of a child, give that child to GOD.

5 to 10 years later, the child that was miraculously born to HANNAH is awakened in the night by GOD, with the CALL, to which he responds "SPEAK, FOR YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING." And GOD responds by describing doing something to change the world, something that will set the ears of all who hear to tingle."

While the Book of GENESIS described GOD commanding LIGHT and there was LIGHT. CALLING for a Firmament in the HEAVENS and there was. In the Book of EXODUS, GOD PARTED THE RED SEA.

Throughout the rest of the Bible, and History, GOD has not been quite so dramatic. Instead, when people did not look for **ANYTHING GOOD to come out of Nazareth**; when Empires thought they put to death those who challenged Authorities; Whenever a DREAM BECAME REALITY, those were MIRACLES.

My own experience is that when Church does not simply go through motions of faith and ritual, when the WORD of GOD seems RARE **AND** we take seriously our CALL to MISSION, Miracles, do happen.

My own 20something year old self as a solo pastor had a Women's Circle that was no longer large enough to be a Women's Ministry. They had done a Bazaar for years, but aging even that seemed too much. They recognized that the Church had supported a Women's Prison Ministry, so they decided to weekly have lunch there. The Warden of the Halfway House thought "How long are these 80 and 90 year olds going to be having lunch with women inmates?" What we had not imagined was that the Church members teaching Crocheting Toilet Paper covers, ironing Waxpaper Placemats, would for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in their lives give possessions to these women that they could give as gifts to family. That changed the attitudes of the Prisoners, such that they went from 5% earning their GED to 95% and where 80% had gone on to commit another Crime, now less than 20% ever returned to Prison! Which was part of why coming as your Pastor 4 ¼ years ago made sense to me.

Who would have imagined that in a SENIORS' RETIREMENT COMMUNITY, in GREEN VALLEY ARIZONA, where at least one in every household has to be at least 55 and the MEDIAN AGE is 72, that in the last two weeks our children could so captivate the faith and love of this people of GOD?

\*Information for the Beginning of this sermon was taken from the book IMAGINABLE by Jane McGonigle, 2022.